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ABSTRACT

Although record numbers of women educators are entering masters and doctoral programs in educational administration, the percentage of women who actually obtain positions in educational administration is under 30 percent. This paper reviews the experiences of women who have obtained positions of educational leadership as reported in a number of studies, and examines the ways in which they prepared to enter and successfully entered the field of educational administration. Despite the wide availability of literature offering suggestions to aspiring women administrators and the evidence that women candidates are following the advice, there is also evidence that women are not acquiring administrative positions or are not staying in the administrative positions for long durations. It is almost as though women are doing everything right and still not succeeding. The paper cautions against falling into the following traps identified by Fine and Gordon (1989): (1) to note positive progress in relation to women's futures without sufficient cautionary analysis; (2) to psychologize structural forces that construct women's lives; and (3) to promote individualized change strategies wherein women are invited to alter some aspect of the self. Therefore, although it is important that women prepare for administrative positions by adopting suggested strategies, they also need to be aware of the structural forces that impinge upon them. (Contains 25 references.) (LMI)

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BECOMING A LEADER: STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

by

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If a woman educator wishes to become an educational administrator in the 1990's, what strategies should she employ? How can she best prepare herself for the realities of school leadership in a world of budget cuts, downsizing and amalgamations? Although women educators are entering MEd and PhD programs in Educational Administration in record numbers, the percentage of women who actually obtain positions in Educational Administration is under thirty percent in most provinces in Canada. It seems that although women educators are training for leadership positions, the number who actually obtain such positions is not in proportion to the number of qualified applicants available.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: 1) to review the experiences of women who have obtained positions of educational leadership as reported in a number of studies, and to examine the ways in which they prepared to enter and successfully entered the field of educational administration, and 2) to discuss a number of the themes, issues and anomalies arising from these experiences.

As I started reviewing the literature and reviewing my own studies for this paper, two contradictory themes or factors became apparent. Considerable literature is available with suggestions and strategies for women to follow in order to become administrators and to all intents and purposes, women candidates for administrative positions are following this advice. Yet there is also evidence that women are not acquiring administrative positions, or are not staying in these administrative positions for long stretches of time. It is almost as though women are doing everything right and still not succeeding. It is almost as though the goal posts are shifting while the game is still going on (Weick, 1976).

The following paragraphs will serve as illustrations. From a recent study, (Gill, 1994, 1995), the following strategies were listed by the participants as helpful in acquiring and succeeding in administrative positions:

Advanced study: working towards a Principal's Certificate and Masters degree
Involvement in professional groups
Holding office in professional organizations or community groups
Involvement in school district leadership developmental programs
Attending the NBCEA/NASSP Assessment Centre
Opportunities to act as substitute for the principal or vice-principal
Background in special education and counselling
Being a woman and raising a family
Encouragement from another administrator
Building a Women in Administration network

When this same group of women were interviewed in 1996/1997 and asked what advice they would give to others preparing to enter their field they suggested:

Take every opportunity to let people know you are interested in administration
Know as much as possible about the area you want to enter both in terms of subject matter and the job itself
Find a mentor
Look ahead at what will be happening in years to come
Get involved in district leadership programs

In addition in 1994, district personnel and the Department of Education had:

specifically encouraged individuals to apply for positions
provided financial incentives for women to take university courses to qualify for a Principal's Certificate

In 1996/1997 the New Brunswick Department of Education mandated that leadership training programs were to be set up in all school districts in the province. These programs were for all teachers interested in administration.

It would appear from the above that the Department of Education and school boards (before they were abolished) in at least one province is very interested in

encouraging women to become educational administrators. It was also apparent that once individuals had obtained positions they took them seriously and worked hard to ensure they were doing the best job possible. Preliminary results from the second phase of the study of women in educational administration (Gill, 1997) indicate that at least some of the participants had moved into positions of increased responsibility. Yet the overall percentage of women in positions of educational administration in this same province was below 30% until 1996-1997.

Lists of strategies exist which document the efforts made by school districts and governments in other jurisdictions to increase the proportion of women in administrative positions, for example (Shakeshaft, 1989):

Consciousness raising
Recruitment of women into preparation programs
Financial assistance
General administration courses and workshops
Courses and workshops concerned with specific barriers
Increase number of professors in educational administration
Curriculum materials
Internships
Support systems
Networking
Developing political clout
Legal remedies and affirmative action
Consciousness raising for those who influence hiring
Creating jobs

In other words, there is considerable knowledge which women can access about how to acquire a position in educational administration.

But there is also considerable evidence to indicate that although women educators are following this advice, they are still not entering educational administration in

sufficient numbers to bring the total to fifty percent in the foreseeable future. Beth Young's (1995) summary of the findings of a number of Canadian studies on women in educational administration indicates that the results of the studies are remarkably similar. The following factors are cited as working against women becoming educational administrators, namely, the assumption that men will be administrators and so this career choice is not taken seriously; that women tend to submit applications for positions only when it is suggested by someone else; that very little sympathy for family responsibilities exists within educational organizations; that women tend to the lack confidence in their own abilities; and that the constant pull felt by women between school responsibilities and domestic responsibilities discourages their even considering a career which might take even more time away from the family. The existence of all these factors mitigate against women obtaining positions in educational administration. However, when individual women are asked whether they have faced discrimination or barriers to acquiring a position in educational administration, many will respond with a negative, although they can also describe experiences which might be termed as barriers.

Baudaux (1995) reviewed research which covered the last thirty years in Quebec and uncovered a number of practices which resulted in the exclusion of women from administrative positions. The strategies employed by women facing this climate of exclusion were also examined and were found to fall into two categories, those employed by women who accepted the status quo and those employed by women who wanted to alter the status quo. Those who accepted the status quo tended to deny any access problem, either by refusing to recognize a problem or by denying that problems applied

to them as individuals. As a result they would employ the following strategies: refuse to adopt "feminist behaviour" on the job, let men speak first in meetings and then introduce their own ideas, being "nice", that is, being gentle and submissive in interactions with males, resorting to humour to cope with a difficult situation and overestimating the use of competence by working exceptionally hard at the job. Those who wanted to alter the status quo tried confrontation, though isolation might be the result, worked to create an anti-sexist culture in some informal gaps in the organization, provided solidarity and sponsorship and encouragement for other women seeking positions and supported equal opportunity programs.

> While women administrators would put themselves in jeopardy if they had to recourse to confrontational strategies, they do shape an identity for themselves, as a group, by developing cultural skills geared to rebelling against the patriarchal construct of the organization (Baudoux, 1995, 79).

> Our results indicate that female candidates who are radical feminists currently have a better chance of being selected, at all three educational levels. . . . In our view, it is a question of introducing administration from a feminist perspective, and rejecting various forms of social exclusion (Baudoux, 1995, 80).

So a dichotomy exists. On the one hand there appears to be considerable support for women to enter educational administration, yet on the other hand factors exist which makes it very difficult for them to actually do so.

A number of reasons for this state of affairs have been suggested. Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell and Whalen (1989) discuss the existence of the phenomenon of denial, whereby disadvantaged people will admit to discrimination against a group but not against themselves individually. It is possible that this phenomenon was at work and

accounted for the finding in some studies where the women administrators denied they had faced barriers but described incidents where they clearly had faced barriers (Gill, 1994, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1986). Recognition of the phenomenon of denial is important when the whole issue of the lack of women in educational administration is addressed. Lack of complaints of discrimination or barriers may lead to the conclusion that all is well and so there is no need for employers to take further action. In addition, Crosby et al., (1989), note that it is only when information is presented in its entirety that the pattern of inequity emerges. Information presented "case by case" does make inequity apparent and therefore unless employers see the whole pattern, there is no perceived need for action against inequity.

Colwill (1993) attributes women's lack of success in obtaining positions of leadership in general to a failure to understand power. According to Colwill

> The lack of women in management is an issue, not of education and training, but of power. Time, patience, and women's self-improvement do not appear to be the solution. The solution, in fact, is similar to the problem: power (p. 81).

Colwill examines three kinds of power, personal power (the belief that one is in control of one's environment), interpersonal power (the ability to influence another person) and organizational power (the ability to mobilize resources to get things done). Colwill's analysis of the research suggests that women are superior to men in organizational power, are no different from men in personal power but do less well than men in interpersonal power. But Colwill also notes that women, while building rich relationships characterized by emotional sharing, tend to find themselves excluded from the informal,

male-dominated networks in their organizations. This exclusion process then bans them from the power strongholds of the organization and thereby lowering their possibilities of promotion. Applying this analysis to educational organizations, while women do "all the right things" in terms of preparing themselves for positions in educational leadership, their access is limited by exclusion from the informal power networks. Only when women break into the informal power networks will they have equal access to positions in educational administration.

From the information above it can be seen that while many strategies and structures are in place to enable women to acquire positions of educational administration should they wish to, there are other factors which are working against them. At the same time, the "current strategies" are not effective in surmounting the barriers.

Three issues need to be considered in addition to the above; the way potential female administrators are socialized, the way in which leadership is conceptualized within the educational setting and the duality of responsibility within the world in which many women live.

Socialization

An account of the results of socialization may be seen in the findings of a number of research studies on women in educational administration. Such findings include the fact that women tend not to apply for administrative positions until it is suggested by others (Gill, 1994, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1986; Young, 1995), that women tend to attribute their success in obtaining such positions to luck (Gill, 1994, 1995; Schmuck &

Schubert, 1986; Young, 1995), that women may lack confidence in their abilities, (Leithwood, 1988) and that the behaviours needed to succeed at the top may be contrary to those to which women are socialized (Faust, 1993). Such findings suggest a number of issues and questions related to how women are socialized and how this socialization affects future decisions and career choices. When most women participants had not considered applying for administrative positions until it was suggested by someone else, does this finding reflect a different orientation to teaching than that demonstrated by men? It may be that men enter teaching in order to become administrators while women enter teaching in order to become teachers. Or it may be that women do not see administration as a "path upwards" or a valued role but see teaching as a valuable goal in itself. It is also possible that pressures have been placed on young women at the time of choosing a career to choose a career that can be "easily combined with marriage and a family." This may be the case particularly with women who grew up in the 1950's and early 1960's and are now in their late forties and early fifties. This same cohort may be trying to counteract socialization from the past which discouraged women from "pushing themselves forward" or seeing themselves a leaders.

If women administrators attribute their acquisition of an administrative position to luck rather than to personal talents and strengths, does this indicate that women do not recognize the skills and talents they have and that they tend to doubt themselves and feel out of control of their destiny? There is no indication that women are less talented or less capable than their male counterparts, suggesting that this perception is this a matter of socialization rather than fact. What are the implications for female education if girls are

taught to doubt themselves and not encouraged to take risks? What are the implications for female education if girls are not given opportunities to develop leadership skills because those opportunities are automatically assigned to the boys just because they are boys. What happens if the underlying assumption within the school and home environment is that boys should naturally "grab" leadership opportunities and boys find themselves reinforced for "grabbing" while girls are censured for "unladylike behaviour". The subsequent lack of practice in childhood and adolescence may then leave women without the skills needed to succeed in a leadership position. Does this situation then encourage women to look to others as leaders rather than trusting themselves and their own abilities?

The above paragraphs reflect some possible effects of socialization on women educators and may account for the lack of women in educational administration. Such effects can be particularly lethal as they are insidious and continue throughout life, often unacknowledged and unaware.

Conceptualization of school organization and leadership

In discussing the need for more women in educational administration there is also a need to reconceptualize what is meant by school leadership and even school organization as a whole. Movies and popular novels, even recently, have tended to present military models of leadership, with set chains of command and importance placed on giving orders and presenting a united front. The "tough guy or gal" who is able to make tough decisions under pressure is portrayed as the ideal of a good leader. The underlying message is that a good leader emulates this behaviour. This message is the

one that is often picked up by members of the public and those responsible for hiring school leaders. Echoes of this leadership model can be found in popular "How to be a good leader" books, where the ideas are based on research data taken from studies on white males in the military.

Current administrative theory textbooks and other writings on leadership present other models of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Owens, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1995). These include concepts such as leadership as collective effort and shared power, (Astin & Leland, 1991, p.8) and moral leadership and building schools as communities of leaders (Sergiovanni, 1995). These models de-emphasize the hierarchical nature of organizations and focus on sharing power and responsibility with followers. Although the textbooks describe how a school organized on these lines could function, there is little evidence that schools are run in this way in practice.

Current government initiatives tend to re-emphasize a bureaucratic model of school organization and decision-making. Curriculum documents and specifications are handed down from a Department of Education and directives are issued related to school issues and organization. These directives do little to encourage a less bureaucratic model of leadership and organization.

The leadership perceptions of those responsible for hiring affect what kind of principal is hired. If members of the hiring committee have a vision of a good leader as a top-down, tough individual and a good school as one in which the principal is "the boss" who makes all the decisions and has all the answers, then individuals who demonstrate these traits will be invited for interviews and subsequently hired.

Is it possible that the women are shying away from this model of school leadership and organization? It may be that women who might wish to be school administrators do not wish to be school administrators in this kind of organization. This view was certainly apparent among some of the participants in a recent study (Gill, 1994).

> If there is a barrier I guess it's people not being out there and knowing the strengths of people that are with them in the building to encourage them to take these leadership roles. Perhaps there are not opportunities delegated to individuals who have particular strengths within the school to take leadership roles. I believe that if a school only has one leader it's in great trouble because nobody can be a leader in everything (p. 16).

At least this participant believed that her school should be a community of teachers sharing the leadership role. It may be that women wishing to become school administrators see and seeing something else as more important namely working in an environment where students and other people come first.

Participants in the same study expressed concern that entering administration would involve losing touch with teaching and students.

> . . . I'm a teacher because I really feel like that and being a vice-principal in this district means that ninety percent of the time you are a classroom teacher and I have ten percent of my time when I'm an administrator . . . so I really feel much more a teacher than I feel an administrator and I like being a teacher.

Unfortunately the recent restructuring of the education system in New Brunswick has lead to a perception that principals are becoming managers as opposed to educational leaders. There is a possibility that these perceptions may discourage women from entering educational administration.

Duality of responsibility

Women assume the major burden for the household and the family and the "administrative workplace" has not always been sensitive to women with family responsibilities. Meetings are organized to suit the male daily timetable, the time table for a male who has a partner at home to keep the home running. So women with young families hesitate to take on the additional responsibilities of school administration and tend to wait until the family has grown up. As an example, one of the women in the study moved to a smaller school to be nearer home and to have more time for the young family (Gill, 1997). Women administrators enter the field later than their male counterparts and are therefore more experienced. But credit is not always given for the skills learned by running a home and raising a family, skills which are directly related to administration.

Strategies with Caution

Given the above, what are the implications for women who wish to apply for positions of educational leadership? The strategies suggested at the beginning of the paper hold good but must be approached with caution. In discussing suggested strategies it is important not to fall into the traps signposted by Fine and Gordon (1989), namely to a) note positive progress in relation to women's futures without sufficient cautionary analysis, b) to psychologize structural forces that construct women's lives by offering internal explanations for social conditions, and c) to promote individualized change strategies wherein women are invited to alter some aspect of the self to transform social arrangements. A review of the New Brunswick School Directories from 1992 through 1996 indicate a slowly growing percentage of women in educational administration

overall. However, with the reorganization of the governance of education in New Brunswick the responsibility for hiring has been redirected to Parents' Committees. Members of these committees must be educated to understand and support women in administrative positions.

So while it is important to take steps to prepare for administrative positions by adopting suggested strategies it is also important to be aware of the outside forces that impinge on women. When women do not obtain administrative positions the reason may not lie in them or in some of the traditional reasons often given when no women are hired. The reasons may well be the outside forces which work, often subtly, to prevent too many women entering the field of educational administration. Departments of Education need to do more than throw money at the problem and school districts that hold Leadership Preparation Programs need to take the initiative to encourage people to apply, particularly women, so potential can be identified early. There is a need to be constantly on the alert for biases and undercurrents and continually bring the problem out into the open. It is not enough to teach and encourage women to do things to improve themselves and their situation in order to obtain an administrative position. It is also necessary to recognize the inequities in society, the unwritten belief that "men can do it better" and change the systemic biases.

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